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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0514

September 9, 2015

Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen, Jr.
Superintendent of U.S. Military Academy at West Point
Taylor Hall, Building 600
West Point, NY 10996

Lt. Gen. Caslen:

As the Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, I am concerned about recent reports regarding the annual U.S. Military Academy at West Point freshmen cadet pillow fight that occurred on August 20, 2015. According to press accounts, "some cadets swung pillowcases packed with hard objects, thought to be helmets, that split lips, broke at least one bone, dislocated shoulders, and knocked cadets unconscious."¹ As a result, 30 cadets were evaluated by medical personnel and 24 were diagnosed with concussions. In a statement, you clarified that all cadets have been returned to duty, and that "a military investigation that began the night of the incident is ongoing."²

While it is appropriate that you initiated an investigation, I am concerned that oversight of this activity has been inadequate. West Point and the Army have released conflicting descriptions about the causes of the incident, and there appears to be a track record of similar injuries in previous years followed by ineffective remedial measures. Two years ago, for example, the pillow fight was cancelled after at least one plebe placed a lockbox in a pillowcase as a weapon, and reports suggest that the helmets which caused this year's concussions had been mandated to prevent injuries following previous incidents. Congress must receive a comprehensive explanation of how these events occurred, what steps are being taken to prevent further incidents, and how West Point will ensure those steps are effective. Our nation's military academies must uphold the highest standards of behavior. The actions of plebes who placed objects into their pillow cases and those upperclassmen who encouraged these actions do not exemplify the honor we expect from our military's next generation of leaders. We must ensure that this august institution lives up to the exceptionally high standards that it represents, and that our future military leaders live up to the great responsibility that rests on their shoulders. We can and we must do better.

¹ Phillips, Dave. *At West Point, Annual Pillow Fight Becomes Weaponized*. NY Times. September 4, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/05/us/at-west-point-annual-pillow-fight-becomes-weaponized.html>; for video of the fight see also, e.g., Laura Italiano, New York Post, *West Points Cadets 'Chose To Hurt People' During Bloody Pillow Fight*, September 4, 2015, available at <http://nypost.com/2015/09/04/west-point-pillow-fight-leaves-30-cadets-injured/>.

² Lt. Gen Robert L. Caslen, Jr., *Statement from the 59th Superintendent, United States Military Academy*, September 5, 2015.

Please provide answers to the following questions by October 5, 2015:

1. What actions are being taken as part of this investigation?
2. What is the timeline of this investigation?
3. What measures will be taken to hold plebes and upperclassmen accountable for injuring fellow students or encouraging such behavior?
4. In a previous and somewhat conflicting statement, the Army claimed that the "cadet chain of command had visibility on this event and took mitigating measures."³ What mitigating measures specifically were taken? When did the administration approve the cadet chain of command's mitigation measures?
5. In that same previous statement, the Army described the pillow fight by saying "many members of the plebe class spontaneously participated in a pillow fight,"⁴ while later statements did not indicate it was spontaneous. Considering the longstanding history of this event, when was the event approved and by whom?
6. What steps will West Point take to prevent such incidents in the future, and how will it ensure that they are effective?
7. Did the administration have past knowledge of such behavior? If so, why did you continue to allow this activity to continue? Did you contemplate the potential liability associated with such an activity?

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your response.

All the best,



Jackie Speier

³ *Army Statement*, September 5, 2015.

⁴ *Army Statement*, September 5, 2015.